

January 21, 1947

1.913
I2 In 3
Ref 3
INFORMATION CASE REPORT NO. 22

Distribution Method

Subject: Bulletin Distribution.

Source: William B. Ward, Head of the Department of Extension Teaching and Information, New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics at Cornell University.

Objective: To find ways and means of improving the old reliable systems of distribution and to determine the effectiveness of new methods.

How Organized: We started at the source of some of our troubles that resulted in too many bulletins on the shelves--ordering too large an edition. In an attempt to find a more businesslike way of ordering certain size editions of bulletins from the printer, rather than just by guess, the printing and distribution history of hundreds of bulletins was traced. The most important fact shown by this study was that the reprints on the shelves were "eating us out of house and home." In many cases, editions of reprints were too large. The heavier first demands were absorbed with the first edition and in most instances the reprinted edition should have been smaller. Moreover, the study served another purpose--it gave us an idea of the probable demand for bulletins on various subjects.

The county agents distribute the lion's share of the 2 to 3 million Cornell bulletins that we publish each year. The New York system of bulletin distribution through the county agents needs an overhaul job, and with their help the Department of Extension Teaching and Information will attempt to improve it.

Radio has become the number two "distributor." Radio listeners' requests for bulletins average 16,000 a month. A survey showed that 83 out of every 100 persons writing to New York State stations for Cornell bulletins were not on the mailing lists of the county agricultural agents and 94 out of every 100 persons were not on the mailing lists of the home demonstration agents. This medium was reaching people of the State who were not active extension cooperators, but who wanted information to help build toward better farming and better living. Approximately 3,000 requests, checked at random as they cleared from radio stations throughout the State, were separated by county. The mail then was sent to the county agricultural agents with a request that they check the names against their mailing lists and report the results. The county home demonstration agents made a similar report.

The rural boxholder method of bulletin distribution also is effective in reaching farmers and homemakers who are not active extension cooperators. A card announcing current agricultural and home economics bulletins was sent during the spring to 11,000 rural boxholders. No

mailing list was used and no postage was supplied for the return cards. The return was slightly more than 7 percent. Another announcement describing new bulletins was sent to 30,000 rural boxholders during the winter months when farmers were not so busy with spring work. The return totaled 12 percent.

Names of those seeking bulletins in the surveys were checked with the county agents' mailing lists. In the first survey about 65 percent were not on those lists; in the second survey, 75 percent. This method was reaching farmers and homemakers who were not only foreign to the mailing lists, but a large percentage were entirely unknown to the agents and did not get information from their offices.

The same method of distribution may be successful also with a tie-up between county agent and college of agriculture or college of home economics. Under this system the announcement cards would be published by the State Extension Service and signed by the county agent. The return cards would be addressed to the college, and the main bulletin distribution would be from there. The farmers and the homemakers then would connect the agents with the colleges, and possibly both would achieve closer cooperation.

Releases about new publications are sent to newspapers and magazines with satisfying results. Some of the weeklies have a special way of handling notices of bulletins. One paper recently started a farm and home page, and one of the features is short write-ups describing and offering Cornell bulletins. Readers send requests for these bulletins to the paper. ("Drop a card to The Sun for Cornell bulletin E-692.") The requests are then sent in a batch to the mailing room at Cornell, and from there the bulletins are sent free directly to the person making the request.

Page proofs of special bulletins are given to selected magazine editors who work a few weeks or months ahead. This gives them and us a good break.

A complete LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, issued each 6 months, keeps persons who write--"Please send me all your bulletins and put me on the mailing list to get all the new ones"--informed of all publications available, and the cost is relatively low.

Publications exhibits at meetings, fairs, field days, and other special events have appeal. One example--on Cornell's Farm and Home Special train, more than 36,000 bulletins were requested on order blanks during the 3-week run by approximately 8,000 persons. The bulletins were mailed from Cornell.

Results:

1. By carefully checking the printing and distribution history of bulletins over a 25- to 35-year period we are getting more effective distribution and saving money that can be used for the publication of more bulletins and for the use of more color.

2. Bulletins, distributed as a result of radio programs, reach farmers and homemakers who are not extension cooperators. This method of distribution is the best means of getting publications to these persons, and it fulfills a vital obligation of the Extension Service. Moreover, radio stations like this service and we get close cooperation from them on farm and home programs.
3. The rural-boxholder method of bulletin distribution also reaches nonextension cooperators and is particularly valuable when blanket coverage of rural areas in certain counties is wanted. The cost would be prohibitive for general use on a State-wide basis in New York.
4. Distribution of publications by means of newspaper notices could be expanded profitably in our State. The system of having the readers write to the paper for the bulletins and then having the university fill the requests contributes toward excellent relationships with the press.
5. A complete list of publications sent regularly to persons on a mailing list is an effective means of distribution and saves money, particularly when requests are made to "send all your bulletins."
6. Publications exhibits at meetings, fairs, and other special events are worth while. It is good business, however, to have an attendant to help people make their selections and fill out order blanks. In most cases we do not hand out bulletins at these affairs.
7. Our county agents distribute the largest percentage of Cornell publications, and their methods need to be analyzed regularly by the editorial and distribution offices and revisions made whenever necessary.

